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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The Arabian Mission

Quarterly Letters from the Field



Number Forty, October to December, 1901.

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QUARTERLY LETTERS FROM THE ARABIAN MISSION

October-December, 1901.

ON THE OMAN COAST.

REV. JAMES E. MOERDYK.

My contribution to the Quarterly Letters must be a report of a two and one-half months' sojourn on the old Pirate Coast of Oman. It will be impossible to give you a detailed account of all experiences so I shall write in four paragraphs.

How We Traveled.

We shipped—a colporter and myself—in a native sail-boat which measured about 45 feet over all. There were thirty native Persian passengers aboard; a captain and four sailors; and two donkies up forward. The ship afforded a cabin of about 8 feet wide, 10 feet long, and hardly more than 3 feet between floor and ceiling. On the floor of this cabin we spread our beds and arranged our boxes along the two sides, which boxes, by the way, we neglected to secure with ropes, so that on the second night out when the ship began to bob about rather overmuch, we were obliged to crawl out from under the pile which had tumbled down upon us. The captain did not sail straightaway for the port we expected to make, but went across the gulf and then came dodging in and out down the Persian coast. Three times we anchored because the sailors feared the boisterous waves. At Duan I succeeded in getting ashore after wading through the surf, and thus obtained my first visit to one of the smaller coast towns of Persia. Now, never mind about the inconveniences of the voyage, but it did seem too bad to be obliged to spend seven days and seven nights before we

arrived at Linga. And it was far more provoking to hear those fatalists excuse their ignorance and laziness by saying, "It was in the will of God." I was aboard three other native boats, sometimes tumbling among the rice bags or huddling between the lumber piles : but, fortunately, none proved so long as the trip in the first boat.

*At Home in
Sharga.*

We spent four days in a date-stick hut in the barnyard of one of the sheikhs. We then succeeded in renting a better hut which was a little farther away from the bazaar, and the location proved very much



A FIRST CLASS PASSAGE TO OMAN.

better than we had expected. There was also a stone lodge with one door and two openings of 6 inches square. Here we stored our luggage and spread our beds in the clean sand, sheltered during the wet nights. This was the only Christian home on that coast. We could not afford much in the way of furniture, but managed to make it quite comfortable, and the fact that we always had plenty of books on the rug attracted many visitors. Many of those who would not buy a gospel in the street were reading the Word

of God in our house. When at Sharga our door was always wide open to all the men.

*Selling the
Scriptures.*

We wanted to rent a shop in Sharga or Debai, where we could display our books in the bazaar and converse with the men, but this proved a failure. There were shops unrented, but when the landlord discovered that we were Christians he refused to rent to us. After two weeks we gave up the attempt for we had learned that the sheikhs had forbidden any one to give us a shop. We therefore pushed out into the streets of these two towns and also visited villages along the coast eastward. We did not always find willing purchasers, and found many who were eager to speak evil of the Christian and his Bible. Nevertheless, we sold gospels. In Ojman we had canvassed the town without selling one book, and were about to depart. While resting in a hut I succeeded in selling a two-cent gospel, and soon we were surprised to find ourselves so busy that we did not at first notice the fanatic who came to harangue the people for buying of the "fakirs." In Hamaria among the first who called to see us was the sheikh of the town. After the usual salaams I wanted him to examine our books, but he positively declined, declaring that he knew they were the "forbidden books." Said he, "I will witness that Jesus was a true prophet of God; now you must witness that Mohammed was a true prophet." Of course we could do no such a thing. He then went out and told the people to go home for our books were forbidden. Well, we thought our work was finished there; but it proved otherwise. We went out into the streets to see the people, and when after sundown we set out to return to Sharga the people were still following us as far out as the ford—buying gospels as fast as we could supply them.

*The Arabs
We Met.*

(1) Slaves. Fully one-half of the population of these coast towns are slaves. Very few slaves can read, and many can only use the Arabic language sufficiently to get along with their masters. (2) Spies. Many of our first visitors proved to be spies sent by the sheikhs, or self-appointed. They came in their pious way to ask questions about our religion and about our teaching. They refused to buy a Bible so that they might read for themselves, so we gave them a few tracts. Some days after their visit we learned that they had

carried the tracts to the elders who had destroyed them. (3) Open enemies. These men were prejudiced, and came with a determined purpose to declare that we were false and Islam was the true religion. Moreover, we found them dishonest ; so much so, that at one time two Moslems were quarreling together about certain quotations from their Koran. In Debai one of these came to me and began reciting his Koran at such a rapid rate that there was no opportunity to talk with him. When, at one time, I succeeded in telling him that all the good in his book had been taken from the Bible, and hence it behooved him to read the true Word of God, he simply avoided me by stating that he did not understand, and then chattered on at a more rapid rate than before. (4) Honest inquirers and friends. Among the many whom we met in these places there were also a few of the good kind. My Arabic was far from perfect, but I managed to stumble along, and because of the subject in hand enjoyed it immensely. To these friends I could give the books which were written to explain the way to the Truth. One man read through three of these books. He came again and again to have me explain certain things which troubled him, and would then return to resume his reading. When I pointed to the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the Christ, and asked him to read from the gospel passages which I selected, he carefully noted these and went to his house to re-read them in his own Bible. On our way back to Bahrein we met this man in Linga, where he told us that he could no longer be a Moslem, but feared to confess Christ in his home in Sharga. The others of our friends did not come out so boldly as this, but we have good reasons to think that they are, in a way, seekers after Truth.

I have finished. We sold 218 Scriptures, and have gained much valuable information about the people and opportunities for missionary work. Pray for the laborers and that the Lord may point out His own.

BAHREIN.

MRS. MARION WELLS THOMS, M.D.

Last year at this time we could only write of a few women treated unsystematically. Now, though this work has not been

what we hope it may be the coming year, we can tell of eight months of regular medical work for women. We have had a room which, though bare of conveniences has been a place in which they could gather and be read and talked to before being treated. During the seven months a record has been kept, 1631 treatments have been given women and children. They have not been classified but include a large variety of medical and minor surgical cases. The past quarter's work represents 770 treatments in the dispensary and 30 visits to the sick in their houses.

*Medical Work
for Women.*

During the year we have even had women in-patients. Two women operated upon consented to remain for after treatment in the house of the "unbeliever." One was a most grateful patient and during the two weeks she remained with us seemed to appreciate all that was done for her. Since leaving she has often sent us her salaams and the tidings that she remained well. The other woman, wife of one of the Shiah leaders, was not as tractable.

*A Disobedient
Patient.*

she remained a month after operation. She had been warned she might need to stay twice that length of time and as she was not quite healed we refused to consent to her going away to celebrate one of the great Moslem feasts. She and her family took the authority into their own hands and she left at night without even saying "salaam."

The dispensary was closed during July, August and September, but the women were not without help. Mrs. Zwemer attended five cases during those months. All but one were seriously complicated. The several necessary visits on each patient were especially trying on account of the extreme heat. Other emergency cases were also treated during the Summer. Many a poor sufferer had cause to be thankful that the clerical missionary was expert in the use of dental forceps.

*Interesting
Cases.*

A great number of the cases treated daily in the dispensary are most uninteresting from a professional standpoint. This Autumn we have had a large number of ulcers to treat. Though some of them surprise us by doing finely after thorough cleansing and proper dressing, the poor food used by many of the people and the bad hygienic surroundings of all are not conducive to rapid healing and they

require long treatment. There are constantly numbers of long neglected eye cases. Most of these could have been easily treated at first but they have either been left entirely alone, or worse still treated by a native "hakim" until sight is almost if not absolutely lost. Often there is nothing to be done except to relieve pain or if some sight remains stop the progress of the disease. Many cases come which are utterly hopeless. Most pitiful of these are little children with both eyes sightless because of the mother's ignorance and uncleanness.

Other discouraging patients are those who after perhaps months of sickness and all sorts of native treatment expect the foreign doctor to cure them in a few days. If they do not see marked improvement in that time they go away and do not return. Some, too, are still afraid of the knife and the mere mention of it is enough to make them flee in terror, though few there are who have not at times had the cauterizing iron applied to their flesh by the native hakims.

However uninteresting the long-treated cases are medically we always feel that there is compensation in the fact that women who have to return often have so many more opportunities of hearing the Gospel. Most of them listen quietly, if not always intelligently, to what is read. Some even ask us to read again if they come after the reading is finished though we sometimes suspect others of the more bigoted of staying away purposely until they think it is over. The simplest truths must be often repeated in order that they may be at all grasped by our listeners. The women often say we are only cattle. We do not know about God and we tell them that it is because of sin that they cannot know Him. That they are better than cattle, they are created in God's image and if they seek forgiveness from their sins in the name of Christ they can understand something of God's love to them. On the other hand, there are those whose too-ready assent to all that is said or such expressions as "We love the prophet Esa" and "We understand," show that they neither understand nor wish to, but think perhaps to please us by appearing to do so.

Mrs. Zwemer has been a constant helper in the dispensary not only in reading and explaining the Bible but also in treating the patients. We hope soon to be able to add a long-sought Bible

woman to our staff. She may with advantage sit and talk with the women awaiting their turn and afterwards call on more of the women in their homes than we are able to at present. The question of supporting a Bible woman has been raised in our little church and it seems a possibility that she may be supported by the congregation, for even though we are such a small number it is our custom to take a collection at our services and last year the offerings amounted to nearly eighty dollars. From this a gift was sent to North China sufferers.

*Support for a
Bible Woman.*

Among the rich and poor the conditions are much alike. Few of the women can read and they are so ignorant it is hard to find language simple enough for them to understand. The very foundations have to be laid before we can have anything upon which to build, and so the work is slow. We try to make use of every opportunity to teach some of the rudiments of better living as in regard to cleanliness, care and training of children, and in taking God's name in vain. Although they hear the muezzin call from the minaret five times each day, "Allah Akbar," God is great, His name is constantly on their tongues. Over and over again we remind them that God's name is holy and that by using it as they do they trample it under foot.

From these facts and more that have been told from time to time it is evident that it is not an easy field to which we invite—rather call—single lady workers but that it has been so long neglected is the stronger reason why it should now receive the attention most other fields have received for years. Perhaps we cannot expect great things from the present generation of women in their ignorance, superstitions and sense of security in Islam, but the streets are filled with little girls who might with tact be gathered into schools and taught so that the next generation may be less hopeless. Mrs. Zwemer says in regard to her visiting: "From October to December inclusive, 38 houses have been visited—some of them three or four times. Quite 200 women have been present in the different houses to hear the Gospel read or simply explained. A number of women have also visited us in the house. We try if possible on each occasion to introduce the old, old story. Two villages just outside Menarnah have also had the opportunity of hearing and

*Visiting
the Homes.*



MRS. THOMS RETURNING FROM A VISIT
TO AN OUT-PATIENT.

obtaining the Gospel but in both places the women are quite bigoted and repeatedly told me that they read the Koran and nothing more, because it contained all they needed. In that same village although they would not let me into their houses, groups gathered around me on the road and asked me to read to them. Some Gospels and Old Testament portions have also found an entrance and readers."

The School.

In looking over the general work of the quarter we can see some signs of progress. The school has been taking on new life and seems to be growing in favor. Thirteen pupils are now enrolled, most of them being large lads. One of them staid away some time to be taught Arabic grammar by a Moslem mullah whom he thought best qualified to teach him the proper use of the sacred tongue, but he came back to be taught the more advanced branch of syntax. He probably knew his first book from cover to cover, but a few questions revealed the fact that he could not tell a noun from a verb, and he was induced to study it again in a more practical way. These Mohammedans, with all their false ideas, are so conceited it is a good thing to have their faith shaken in their own teaching and consequently their respect raised for Christian learning.

Bible Sales.

The book sales have been greater than in any previous year. The total number of Scriptures sold was 1406, against 934 last year. All but 50 of them were to Moslems. Most of the books sold, are of course, in Arabic, but there being a good many Persians here, over 100 Persian Scriptures were sold. The greater number have been sold on tours about the island and on the mainland, but 329 were sold in the Bible

shops and 289 in the dispensary which shows that it is not only a good place to preach the Word but also to sell it.

Others have told of the several important tours made from this station during the year. Over 2700 miles have been traveled.

A number of men have been coming to the house for some time in the evenings for explanation of the Scriptures and Christian doctrines. Two or three seem very much in earnest and though none has as yet sufficient courage to even breathe his convictions to his Moslem friends the year does not close without some promise of that for which we labor.

SHARON J. THOMS, M.D.

*A Rest Without
Idleness.*

You have not heard directly from me of the medical work since the first quarter, although the work has been mentioned by others. The reason for this silence was that just before the end of the second quarter we left very suddenly for India on account of Frances' illness, and did not get back to the field until just after the letters for the third quarter had been sent.

We were sorry to be away from the work so long but it could not be avoided, and our time was not wasted for it was spent in one of the largest and best managed mission hospitals in India, in which three European doctors, three European nurses, a native Christian doctor from the Agra Medical College, and thirty-five native assistants are busy every day healing the sick and preaching the gospel by word and deed. While there we learned many things that will help us in the management of our new hospital when it is finished. It was a great privilege also to meet so many missionaries, not only in Syrinagar, but en route from Karachi, where we left the boat. We hope this privilege will be a continuous blessing by correspondence with some of them.

*Operating Under
Difficulties.*

The picture shows an eye operation in the court-yard, the place where most of our operations are done for the lack of a better place at present, but we hope to have our new hospital ready for use next year by this time, when we hope to have a well-lighted, dust-proof room in which to do our operations.

The picture shows Mrs. Thoms assisting me, with our only native assistant, Gabriel, who has had no previous experience or instruction, and who is not of much account as a dispensary assistant, but he is a willing and faithful worker, and when I get a partly trained dispenser and assistant from Bagdad whom I am expecting soon, he will go back to regular colporter work. He was originally a well-to-do Christian shop-keeper from the borders of Armenia, where in one day he was made destitute. His brother and several other relatives killed in cold blood, and he,



OPERATING UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

himself, escaped with his family, by what he considers a modern miracle.

*Patients in a
Hut.*

We have built a small temporary building in which to keep some of the surgical patients, especially those coming from a distance. This, by crowding, will hold six date-stick beds, and we call it "the hospital," but a small mat-roofed hut could hardly be properly given such a dignified name, so the "Mason Memorial Hospital" will be the first mission hospital in Arabia, Palestine generally being thought of as a country by itself and not as being in Arabia.

The Lord has abundantly blessed us this year. Pray with us that we may have faith to expect even greater blessings with the wider opportunities of service that should come with the hospital.

The annual report of the medical work will be out in a short time and I will refer you to that for further information about the Hospital, how the money came in direct answer to prayer, and about our plans.

Statistics of Mercy. During the nine months we have been at Bahrein we have given 10,681 treatments and done 64 operations under anæsthetics. Could we have remained at Bahrein during the Summer the number of treatments would have probably reached 14,000 for the year. Of the number seen about 9,000 were males and the remainder were females.

The Scriptures are read and explained and prayer offered at the Dispensary each morning before it is opened, then all who are present at this time receive tickets and are seen before any who come afterward. If a second crowd collects they are preached to again, and a second set of tickets is given out. They have the gospel preached to them pretty straight and give very good attention. Two hundred and eighty-nine Scriptures and portions have been sold and several hundred tracts distributed at the dispensary, so you see much good seed has been sown. May the Lord of the harvest cause it to grow and bring forth a harvest in his own time. We see many signs of the sprouting seed; but the ground has baked so long under the sun of self-righteousness, and the few sprouts that have appeared have so often been crushed by the flood of persecution, that the tender shoots are waiting below the ground until they receive more strength of conviction when suddenly there will be a great breaking forth, each one being encouraged by others.

Call for a New Medical Missionary. Much time next year will be spent in building the Hospital, and we hope to have it ready for occupation next year by or before this time. With the many blessings that we should expect to come with the Hospital to the work will be many obligations. Another doctor should be sent out at once, not only that he may get the necessary language preparation for taking charge of the work when we go home on furlough, but that one of us may be free to make tours about the

islands and into the interior. Then, too, it would mean untold harm to the work should the one male doctor here be compelled to leave a hospital full of sick and surgical patients for two or three months as was necessary this Summer in the case of the Dispensary. We will pray that some one may be led to supply the means to send a doctor for the work. Would the amount necessary, expended in any other way, bring to the giver greater satisfaction than to know that he had a representative or substitute in the front ranks doing the almost endless amount of good that a medical missionary can do in this land. Will not some one to whom God has given bountifully *consider* this proposition, and put by the side of the gift that has made possible a hospital in Bahrein, a gift that will supply *this necessity*.

BUSRAH.

REV. F. J. BARNY.

This time I let two of the colporters write the report, I merely acting as interpreter for them. The quarter has been a busy one, the weather has been most propitious and the work has prospered. Sales of Scriptures were good. I have just made out the returns for the year and I find the total of sales amounts to 1740 copies which is seventeen per cent. more than last year, and forty-four per cent. more than two years ago. This is cause for sincere gratitude to God, especially considering the many untoward circumstances that prevailed during the year.

Spread of the Gospel.

Colporter Yakoub writes about the work at Amara where he has been for five months. "I opened the shop daily and during my stay most of the people of the place came and there was no opposition except in the last few days when, on account of the quarrel between England and Turkey over Kuwait, some people tried to persecute me thinking that our shop had some connection with the English. Every day there were many people coming to the shop and there was religious conversation and discussion. There were some men of whom also I have hope who gladly gave me all freedom to speak plainly and whom I found open to the truth, and who now have some of the simple truths of our religion. At times so many people came that the shop could not hold them.

Often Moslems confessed that there was need of reformation in this country not merely in economic matters but especially in religious things, and some said they would become Christians, but the times are not favorable and there is no liberty.

*How the Word
is Glorified.*

At times I shut the shop and went to places in the neighborhood of Amara to sell books. I wanted particularly to go to some new places to open them for our work, but there were always disturbances on the roads and at those places. I sent some books with friends who sold them there. This is my report in brief and now let us ask the Master to bless his work that the sowers and the reapers may rejoice together."

Colportur Micha who has been to Nasariyeh for the last four months writes: "When I arrived at my place the policeman ordered me not to open the shop unless I had a permit from the authorities of Busrah which I had not. On the second day as I was going to the *serai* (City Hall) the policeman saw me and told me I could open the shop until he gave me further orders. So I went and opened up and after cleaning and dusting I sold some Hebrew books which the Jews needed for their school. Then people began to come to the shop, many of them petty officers from among the soldiers. (A garrison is always stationed at Nasariyeh, sometimes as large as two thousand men, as Nasariyeh is one of the gates to the Nejd country. In fact it is becoming more and more a military post and its prospects as a trading center seem to be fading.) These asked for Turkish books and I offered them the Bible which some of them took up and examined. This was a good occasion for teaching and exposition. Thus it went on for about a month when the policeman came, and after taking some books from the shop shut and sealed it. (The account of his experiences with the authorities is too long for insertion. It is enough to say that in a few days the shop was reopened, and all the books returned after several weeks through the kind mediation of our Consular Agent.)

*Moslems Seeking
the Light.*

After these events I went to S—— and sold some portions and as I was going about in the bazaars one called me and asked me about my belief in the Christ and how we believe in His divine sonship. I set forth our beliefs with the reasons, some of which he accepted and some rejected and promised to call on me again. On the second

day an employe of the government found me and asked me to come to a house where some men were in the habit of gathering winter nights to discuss questions of religion. The place is a large room belonging to one of the rich merchants of the town and men come here, drink coffee and talk mostly about religion. (Compare opening scenes of Muir's *Sweet First Fruits*.) That evening there were about twenty-five persons present and the conversation was all religious, and I spoke in all freedom of Christ and his offices and attributes and all listened perfectly. Among them was one who has received the truth and is ready to join the church and I saw nothing in him that would forbid such a step. I was much pleased by the assembly and remained more than three hours, and

*Ready to
Confess Christ.*

when I started to go away the owner of the house thanked me and asked me to call on him every time I came to the place. From here I went to another town which is ruder and more uncivilized than any others, when I was nearly driven out with stones and then returned to Nasariyeh. Later I went up the Shattel Hai. This country is all given to the cultivation of grain and as the crops failed last year the people are very poor and sales were few. I will relate one incident. In one town I sold a portion to a soldier and later he wanted to return it. When I refused to allow this he went for some more soldiers and in the midst of the bazaar he, with fifteen others, surrounded me and wanted to force me to take it back and were about to strike me when, at this hour of peril, the brother of Lydia (the Bahrein convert) came up and begged them not to do me any hurt, so they only tore up the book and left me. These are some of the events on the road, some difficulties and some encouragements. We see that the truth is making headway. Let us pray the Lord Jesus to give grace to those who are in darkness, and to shed abroad the light of His Gospel in their hearts. Amen."

MUSCAT.

REV. JAMES CANTINE.

The past three months have gone very rapidly, and have left almost nothing worth chronicling for the quarterly letter. My own energies have been expended in the usual routine of mission

life in and about Muscat. I was in hopes of being able to make a tour inland,—a gift received from the Sunday-school of the college at Beirut having been set apart for this purpose,—but the oversight of the rebuilding of the mission house kept me at home. The colporter, Said, however, spent nearly a month up the coast and as far as the town of Rustak. His experiences were the usual ones of light and shadow, and though his sales were not much over a

hundred Scriptures, yet I am sure that his walk

Said's Tour. and conversation also daily proclaimed the truth.

It is very comforting to have complete confidence in one's assistant, and I can believe that he always does his best, and that prayerfully. Colportage in Mohammedan lands requires special gifts of courage and humility. In one village Said reported that he was treated like the two men who were the guests of Lot in Sodom, only in his case the house was assaulted by women, both old and young. Many portions are also returned when, after an hour or a day, something is found which antagonizes the teaching of Islam, and thus discouragement may closely follow a successful day's sales. In the largest town in this section of Oman, Rustak, he found the books sold a previous day in a neighboring village, were being hawked for sale in the streets by a public auctioneer, effectually prejudicing the people against the Bible and his own attempts to circulate it. On the other hand friends were made here and there, and the joy of leaving behind, not alone the book, but a good opinion of those who practice and live by it is a real one.

*Religious
Discussions.*

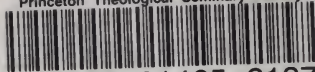
The month of December nearly corresponded to the Arab's month of fasting, during which we scarcely expect to do much among them, but this year we have been gladdened by a number of sales, and especially by a series of meetings at which, by invitation, Said met the neighboring householders for talks on religious matters. It is too soon to tell whether they will be kept up or what impression has been made, but these opportunities are a hopeful sign, and we pray that they may be fruitful of much good.

My own Sunday services have been pleasantly varied by invitations to preach on English cruisers and gunboats in the harbor, and I am not without hope that when our new chapel is finished we will have larger gatherings in our house.

A large number of calls from Arab sheikhs inland have been received at the mission house, and the returning of them at their own towns and villages is one of the pleasurable anticipations for the coming year, which we trust will be full of joyous service amid widening opportunities.

N. B.—The Arabian Mission depends for its support and the extension of its work, not on the treasury of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, though under its care and administration, but upon contributions specifically made for this purpose. The churches, societies and individuals subscribing are not confined to the Reformed Church. Members of other denominations are among its supporters and its missionaries. Regular gifts and special donations are invited from all who are interested in Mission work in Arabia. Regular contributors will receive quarterly letters and annual reports, without application. All contributions, or applications for literature or information, should be sent to "THE ARABIAN MISSION," 25 East 22d Street, New York.

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